

# **Oral History**

## **Merritt Island 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Titusville, Florida**

**November 2013**

This is a panel discussion comprising of current and retired Fish and Wildlife Service employees sharing stories of their time at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Denny Holland is leading the discussion with a panel and the attendees include:

Robin Fields  
J.C. Bryant  
Steve and Bonnie Vehrs  
Joan Page  
Elwood and June Hurte  
Paul and Joan Sykes  
Stevie Chestnut-Hicks

Ward Feurt  
Shawn & Natalie Harris  
Dwight Cooley  
Emery Hoyle  
Boyd Blihovde  
Dorn Whitmore  
Jason Vehrs

Ron Hight  
Jeff Fountain  
Frank Cole  
Howard Poitevint  
Elizabeth Souheaver



From left to right. Front row: Steve Vehrs, Bonnie Vehrs, June Cole, Frank Cole, Joan Page. Middle row: Elizabeth Souheaver, Ward Feurt, Stevie Chestnut-Hicks, Paul Sykes, Elwood Hurte. Back row: Dwight Cooley, Emery Hoyle, Boyd Blihovde, Dorn Whitmore, Jason Vehrs, Ron Hight, Jeff Foundation, Howard Poitevint and wife.

DENNY: My name is Denny Holland I was never stationed on this wonderful refuge, but I visited a number of times. And I am with the Heritage Committee from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. And we're here to collect stories and celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Starting off, my left to right you are.

ROBIN: My name is Robin Fields. I started here as a temporary 90 day Biological Aide because the Fish and Wildlife Service, at that time the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, needed women. So I was here from 1971 through '73, and I'm thrilled here that some of my partners in crime, J.C., and Jefferson L. Fountain III back there, and Elwood Hurte from Paint Link Kentucky; they're here today. And I ended up being a Refuge Manager, or an Assistant Refuge Manager here.



J.C. Bryant

J.C.: I'm J.C. Bryant. I was here from July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970 to about the summer of 1973 as an Assistant Manager, that didn't mean anything. I did whatever there was; I hauled a lot of garage, mowed a lot grass. I didn't help manage nothing.

(Laughing)

STEVE: I'm Steve Vehrs, I was Project Leader here from 1977 to 1990. And this was during the period when we had the Fire Management Program really kick off big time, and we ended up losing a couple of our employees, who we certainly want to honor today. And also the Space Shuttle Program was just kicking off, so we were here a year and half or so ahead of the first launch, I think, of the Shuttle Program. So we had a lot of interesting involvement with NASA during those years. And I think we probably faded away from some of the involvement that had taken place prior to my coming here. We didn't have to, we kind of phased out of the security aspect of the shuttle launches, or the Saturn Five launches earlier that the refuge was really deeply involved in. So when I came Elwood was here, Ward was here, Harvey and Joan were here. Something I'd like to say, this was started before we ever came, but of course Thanksgiving was when we kicked off our hunting program, Waterfowl Hunting Program, in the fall. So that was our big opener, so we would all gather after the season closed that day and we'd go to Harvey and Joan's house for Thanksgiving dinner; this has been going, I know, before we came in '77 and it went on for many, many years after that didn't it Joan.

JOAN P.: Yes indeed.

BONNIE: I'm Bonnie Vehrs. I also served who only stood and waited.

(Laughing)

JOAN: As he just mentioned, my name is Joan Page, wife of Harvey Page that took care of all the citrus. He managed

the citrus trees, and you know there was a bunch of them.

STEVE: Twenty-five hundred acres.

JOAN P.: At least, and two in my yard. And I would hear about the frost and all of the terrible things weather can do to a citrus grove. But anyway, he enjoyed it and I enjoyed it when he did. And I enjoyed having Thanksgiving, you know people that are away, and this is the season for it to, people that are away from home need something to pull them back into a family. And it was my privilege, one time it was 16 people and the biggest was 32; we moved furniture for that. And everybody bought something and we had a good time, and I was just proud to do that.

DENNY: I know what you mean. My wife did the same thing, because Thanksgiving usually coincided with hunting season.

JOAN P.: Yes.

DENNY: And so, hey we were all working. So at night everybody would gather at our house, thanks to Kathy's efforts. Most of them lived after that...

JOAN P.: Yeah, I noticed that, yes.

STEVIE: May add to something Ms. Page. One thing I remember fondly is that Harvey always referred to you as his bride.

JOAN P.: That's right. If he didn't, it would be awful.

(Laughing)

STEVE: Harv hugged all the women too.

JOAN P.: He was a hugger.

DENNY: Well you're supposed to.

JEFF: Harvey didn't hug me.

(Laughing).

DENNY: I thought I did. Elwood.



Elwood Hurte

ELWOOD: My name's Elwood Hurte and I worked the maintenance end of it from '71 to '99. And met a lot of interesting people, most of all (unintelligible), J.C., and Jefferson L. Fountain back there, and Ward Feurt, the scruffy looking guy (unintelligible). And Robin, she'd come here about the same time I did, and we had quite a time.

DENNY: You and I had quite a time working on one of those launches.

ELWOOD: Yeah, we used to have the, those awful mosquito lagoons for NASA for security purposes. And Denny used to come and bring his airboat, we had a good time spraying.

DENNY: I sank at the time also.

ELWOOD: He's spraying J.C. over there.

J.C.: (Unintelligible) He was in on that. (Unintelligible, loud noise) I said Space Center couldn't have done it without us.

(Laughing)

DENNY: One of the things that Ed Colinsworth told me, Ed was the Manager down at Chassahowitzka. But he said, he assured me that the Apollo Program would never have developed had it not been for Hal O'Connor. He says, and I learned this first hand as we took one on the tours that Hal that leading. "We will be launching tomorrow at...time." And he's go into all the detail, but it was always we. It wasn't NASA, it was (unintelligible), Ed was saying, "Man I didn't know we were that important."

J.C.: We were always hoping we'd get Hal a seat on one of them things.

(Laughing)

ELWOOD: Now you better watch Hal, (unintelligible, people laughing).

JUNE: Okay. I'm June Hurte, Elwood's wife, and I've been associated with the Refuge ever since he started. And that was a good year for him because he got married in June and started work here in July. And I've enjoyed every person I met here, working here. And then I started working here in '90, I think it was and then I retired in 2000. And I really enjoyed it, and I still enjoy getting to know people.

JEFF: Now as I recall Elwood got laid off at NASA.

JUNE: Right.

JEFF: Took two years just enjoying himself...

JUNE: Found a wife.

JEFF: ...found a wife. She suggested that he might find something to do during the day.

(Laughing).

DENNY: And he did.

ELWOOD: Getting laid off, that's how I ended up with her.

JUNE: But he don't regret a minute of it.

DENNY: Of course not.

DENNY: Joan.

JOAN S.: My name is Joan Sykes, and my husband Paul worked with the Dusky Seaside sparrow. I was his home support, and was fortunate to have been able to travel to Titusville with him once in a while, and I actually did get to see some the Dusgies. And I've heard many of your names before, but have never met most of you, but it is a privilege to have the opportunity to do so today. And I'm having a really good time at this gathering.

PAUL: I am Paul Sykes. I appreciate the invitation to join this special group of dedicated people, many of whom I have known and have had the pleasure of working with over the years. I was



not on the staff here at Merritt Island, so I am somewhat of an "outsider". I was a Wildlife Research Biologist of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (which at the time was part of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, now under the U. S. Geological Survey) working out of the Delray Beach, Florida Field Station, conducting a study on the Dusky Seaside Sparrow from 1968 through 1976. I was here, and with other biologists, documented the demise of the sparrow, which finally went extinct. All the biologist (Chuck Trost, grad student at University of Florida; Brian Sharp, grad student at the University of Wisconsin, myself, Jim Baker, Merritt Island NWR biologist; Bill Leenhouts, Merritt Island NWR biologist; and Herb Kale, biologist, Florida Mosquito Research Laboratory at Vero Beach; and others) that worked with the sparrow, all pleaded over the years with State and Federal Agencies in an effort to acquire and protect the bird's habitat, but all efforts came too late. On the positive side, it was enjoyable working with the refuge staff, everyone pitched in to assist me in my study. I was here frequently during the bird's breeding season and usually stayed in the old pink house out in the boondocks where I did my part feeding a good many female mosquitoes, which seemed to always be hungry for a blood meal. But, it saved a lot of motel bills and helped out on my rather slim operating budget. My one-man field station at Delray was closed in the mid - 1980s and I was transferred to the Athens, Georgia Field Station, retiring in April 2007 with 42 years of Federal Service. I had a most enjoyable association with the refuge and the staff over the years. I am deeply grieved over the loss of the Dusky Seaside Sparrow and in hindsight wish we had been more

forceful in convincing others to take the necessary actions that would have resulted in a different outcome.

STEVE: Jim Baker played a huge role in the dusky management plan too, and he and Gale were wonderful. They were here.

PAUL: Yes, I worked with Jim, as well as Bill Leenhouts, Herb Kale, and Brian Sharp. Chuck Trost conducted the first formal study of the Dusky Seaside Sparrow. His study was long before I started working with the bird.

STEVIE: I'm Stevie Chestnut-Hicks; I'm not a Biologist. I started as an YCC Leader in '78. And then I came back for year of YACC; I was a library student. So at the time the headquarters was in the old chicken farm, the house of the chicken farm. We didn't have any farm buildings left, but we had trailers and one of those trailers was the library. So I put together the slides, literature, maps, fire line maps, and I worked great people; it was a wonderful experience.

WARD: You had the only building that was always air conditioned.

(Laughing)

STEVIE: I did have a lot of visitors out there. Let's see Steve Vehrs was the Manager, Ward was there, Elwood was there, Mr. Page was there, Dorn was there, he was my boss, he was PR. We made the first sign for the Black Point Wildlife Drive.

DORN: I think Robin was the (unintelligible).

ROBIN: And it lasted a week and a half before a drunk kid went down that road and went right through it.

DORN: I think the same drunk kid wiped ours out too, several of ours.

STEVIE: And Beau Sauselein was there too.

WARD: My name's Ward Feurt. I worked here from 1975 to 1984. And had a lot of background noise at that time. (Laughing, because there is a lot of background noise.) I started out as a Laborer under a Title 10 as hard core unemployed. And when I got here Jeff Foundation hired me, and Elwood and Duffy and Harold Johnson was the Outdoor Recreation Planner. Lois Brown and Barbara Claus were in the office. (unintelligible, too much background noise). It seems like Dorn had been here almost all that time, but I think it's just because Dorn's become the institutional memory of Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge. So I started out as a Laborer, became Labor Leader so I got promoted; that was pretty good. Worked as a maintenance worker, worked as an engineering equipment operator, and became a Biological Technician here, and then led the YCC then YACC program for about a year. (unintelligible, background noise).

STEVIE: What about that equipment Ward?

WARD: Yeah I was, you know actually I'd like to go back to...is that who hired you Stevie, because I don't think it was Dorn. Now I'm rethinking that process.

NATALIE: My name is Natalie Harris and I'm the wife of Sean Harris, who was with Fish and Wildlife Service.

SHAWN: And I'm Shawn Harris, and I actually am one of the few employees that actually worked for both agencies, National Park Service at Canaveral, and Fish and Wildlife. I started with the Park Service at Canaveral and worked multiple, temporary, seasonal appointments. But actually my first job there was in '78 in the Cedar Program. And my time was running out with the Park Service and apparently Fred Sharp, who was the Facility Manager at the time, knew somebody at Fish and Wildlife and he said, "Hey they need some help down there." So they sent me down there and I worked a couple of weeks down there, not realizing they gave me the worse, nastiness job to see whether I could take it. My very first job was to crawl up under that new visitor's center, somebody had sprayed red marks around the poles, and I had to crawl under on my back and scrub the red off of those poles. I don't know who would have seen those red marks, (unintelligible, everyone laughing) underneath that building, but I think they were trying to see whether or not I would do it. So (unintelligible) the person that I talked to (unintelligible), "How would you like to stay?" And at that time I needed a job, and I think it was \$6.85, which was a lot of money back then. And so I began to work here and my first job title Firefighter/(unintelligible, background noise.) And my first boss was Mr. Harvey Page. And this guy by the name of Steve Vehrs came up with this good idea about killing Brazilian pepper on the dikes. And the first job we had was fabricating a truck to kill the Brazilian

pepper along the dike. Well I didn't realize I was the poor smuck that had the short straw because nobody wanted to do it. So that's how Harvey and I, we developed a truck. And I actually still have a whole bunch of pictures, but I could not find them to prove exactly what I was saying. But I do, on a serious point, this was probably one of the best things that has ever happened to me besides meeting my wife. (Everyone laughing, some casual talk.) But seriously I got a chance to meet a lot of wonderful people. I did not even realize, even though I was born and raised here, that there was even a wildlife refuge or a national park; I didn't even know it. But it has been one of the most fulfilling experiences for me. I've got the chance to travel all over the country, being in California one weekend, two weekends later in Okefenokee Swamp, and month later being down at Key Deer. So it's like I got a chance to see things that I would have never seen before. And then the opportunity came in '91, '92 somewhere around there that I went back over to the Park Service, and I've been there ever since. (Unintelligible) to say that I met some good people like Jimmy Clark, and Tommy Patterson, (unintelligible). So it was a lot of wonderful people and, again, I still have a bunch of pictures of all those guys and I wish I could've found them and share them with you. But I want to thank Steve Vehrs and people like that for the opportunity for a young man like me that, I have no idea which way I went, but I went on and was able to find a career, and meet my wonderful wife at the Park Service, also she's been there 24 years; I know you y'all can't believe that, must be thinking she started when she was fourteen.

(Everyone laughing).

STEVE: Shawn, you know actually those red lines, we found Duffy laid up underneath the building, and crawled out of there complaining about those red lines. (Everyone laughing).

DWIGHT: Well I'm Dwight Cooley and I was here from July of 1987 to May of 1991 as Refuge Biologist. It was a lot of firsts for me. It was the first time that I actually worked in refuges; I spent the first seven years of my career in Ecological Services. It was actually the first time that I had been further south in Florida then Panama City. My initial drive down here was the first time I had ever done that. And that was the first time I got to see the shuttle launches, and I came in just after the Challenger disaster, and was here through the start-up of the shuttle program again. Best, from the professional standpoint, the best, most fulfilling, funniest four years of my career was here. There certainly was a lot of things going on here but the most, I think, fulfilling was just the staff of people that was here; the people I got to know and became friends with. So I'm certainly glad to have been here for that for years, and I want to thank Steve Vehrs for having foresight to hire me in the first place. And Ron Hight for not firing me after Steve left. I enjoyed every minute of the time I was here.

ELWOOD: But you've got to tell that premier story about (unintelligible).

DORN: Now we're not telling any stories yet.

(Laughing)

DWIGHT: The Captain Ahab story.

(Everyone laughing). During that four years that I was here, we had a research project going on, rather involved research project as a matter of fact.

STEVE: Actually it wasn't a research project it was a wildlife management project.

DWIGHT: That's right, a wildlife management project.

STEVE: You had to be careful about research projects.

DWIGHT: And one component of that project was we would go out periodically and we had at time, I think, we had three mullet boats, at least two mullet boats here. We would go out and we would set nets to catch mullet right as part of this wildlife management project.

EMERY: (Unintelligible) Survey.

DWIGHT: Yes. That's exactly what it was. So I can't remember what really precipitated us going out that day to put the nets up; I'm sure Dorn can remember. But we decided to go out and put the nets out to catch mullet. And in the boat our pilot was (Name) Davis, there was myself, Dorn, and his friend from New York and I can never remember his name.

DORN: Pat (Name).

DWIGHT: Pat, yeah from New York. So this particular mullet boat had the engine (unintelligible) was kind of in the middle of the boat. And we were in Banana River, and in order to see mullet better, Dorn got on top of the engine (unintelligible) and of course he was

doing this thing (unintelligible, people laughing). And of course Mike Davis was, we were probably going 40 miles an hour, it was wide open at the time, and Dorn was actually the first one to see that sandbar across the (unintelligible, people laughing). But before he could say anything, (unintelligible) hit the sandbar, we stopped immediately. So Dorn, I looked back and there was Dorn and he was threshed forward probably about 60 miles an hour from the boat. And everything had picked up, it was empty and (unintelligible) picked up a bucket and it was empty and threw that (unintelligible), ice chest and it was empty. And he was (unintelligible) coming to the front boat, and I said this could be bad. So here he comes, his eyes are wide like this and he reaches to grab me and I kind of side step him, I didn't want to go in the (unintelligible) too. So there goes Dorn tumbling in slow motion off the end of the mullet boat and had his Captain Jack's hat on. And he went, obviously went completely underwater. When he came back up, (unintelligible) and that Captain Jack's at was still on and his eyes were still that big. And I remember something about son of something (everyone laughing). So that was Captain Ahab, he was; he was up there doing like this

JASON: Well and the real story is that Mikey worked for Dorn and Mikey and Dwight were in on it and they steered Dorn into that sandbar. That's the real story.

DWIGHT: We would never had done anything like that.

DENNY: Oh of course not, yeah.



EMERY: My name's Emery Hoyle I was the Assistant Manager, Junior Assistant Manager here, which like J.C. I occupied that position which was basically do anything that needed to be done and be glad to do it.

J.C.: Anybody could think it.

EMERY: Yeah anybody could think of. So that was my position while I was here from 1997 to 2000. I actually, when I was at FLETC, I was a co-opt student at Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge and while I was at FLETC I was selected for a position at Lower Suwannee. And then my boss up there, John Taylor and Ron were good buddies from their co-opt days and they arranged this deal to get me down here to Merritt Island. And so I had a quandary on my hands, I had been offered a position at Lower Suwannee as soon as I graduated from FLETC or I could go to Merritt Island, this great place with space shuttles and all this stuff. So I had my wife come down one weekend and we went to Chiefland Florida first. And we rode through the woods there in Chiefland and then we drove over here and met Ron and Ralph Lloyd, the Deputy.

DENNY: That took some real scheming on your part to show her Chiefland first.

EMERY: Yeah we went out to eat. So, quickly, we went in town five minutes probably before we decided that the best fit for us, at the time anyways, was going to be Merritt Island. So I happened to be at FLETC with Jason, so I got a little jump start on the goings on here and what not.

WARD: And you came anyway.

EMERY: And I came anyway. And the things that stick in my mind the most when I got here are having to completely relearn all the trees, all the wildlife having grown up in north Alabama. It was like being plucked from Earth and put on Mars. And I think that the year that I got here, even during December and January, it was the worst year for mosquitoes on record according to Elwood. And I knew he had seen a lot of mosquito years, and it took me a while, I was kind of slow back then; still a little slow. But when I first got here Ron, every time he'd go out to leave the office and go out on to the refuge, he'd say, "Come on, come on go with me. Come ride with me." And I felt very honored by that, for the Project Leader to get the young Assistant Manager to come ride around with him. And it didn't long to figure out that I was the gate man that had to get out in a black cloud of mosquitoes; it didn't take long for me to figure that one out.

DENNY: After all you were a college graduate.

EMERY: That's right. But the main thing that sticks in my mind is the diversity of activities and programs here, as well as the diversity of staff. And just the unique characters that anchored that staff and Elwood being the front and center of that cast of unique characters. I think I was here maybe three days before I had gotten my obligatory nickname from Elwood, he had nicknames for everybody. But I look back on it and one of the best memories, best times of my life.

DENNY: You will always look back on it the same way. That's the beauty of the organization and the individual stations,

each on is different and the staffs are different.

BOYD: I'm Boyd Blihovde, and I came a long ways because Merritt Island is the closest thing to home that I have. My dad was Assistant Manager here, started sometime in the early 80's. And so I went to middle school in Titusville, and we lived in Mims. And then I got my first, real paying job as an YCC student in 1989 and worked with a lot of folks that are here. And some that are still working out at the refuge today. It was the hardest work I've ever done, but it was the most enjoyable work. And Jason Vehrs was my youth leader, or our adult leader on the crew, and so it was a real great experience. But it was very hard work carrying lumber out to build boardwalks, and digging holes through limestone with nothing but post hole diggers and a pry bar. So it was a great experience, but I feel like it was like home because even before I started working I came out to the Refuge with my dad and we'd go fishing, when you used to be able to go fishing out on the refuge around the visitor's center. We went out "tagging" redfish out in the closed areas of the refuge when refuge staff used to do that. And so those were memories that I'll never forget. We really enjoyed it as kids, my brothers, both my brothers and I because we had this paradise as our back yard. After YCC, I obviously left and did other things but then I got my first gig with the Fish and Wildlife Service (my first permanent FWS job) at Merritt Island as a fire crew member doing fire type work over at the Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, which is complexed under Merritt Island. I worked with Dorn, Ron, and Ralph Lloyd (who's still out at the refuge). There's a lot of firsts

for me as well at Merritt Island and Archie Carr NWR where I worked for Dr. Ehrhart doing sea turtle research for eight years. So I don't know if that's when Archie Carr NWR was under Merritt Island or not, but we were all one big family anyway.

JASON: Where are you guys now?

BOYD: And now I'm Laguna Atascosa in Texas as the Refuge Manager out there.

DENNY: How long have you been out there Boyd?

BOYD: Only about three months, more like four months.

DENNY: Second generation, as is Jason. And me also.

DORN: My name is Dorn Whitmore; I spent my entire career at Merritt Island. I started July 30, 1978 and retired January 1, 2012. So I spent 37 years, or something like that, of my life at Merritt Island and the best years of my life; I mean more than half my life was spent here. Saw lots and lots of changes over time. I have a debt of gratitude to Steve Vehrs who picked me off that federal register and gave me a phone call and interviewed me over the phone and invited me to join the staff here.

STEVE: It was God's grace.

DORN: It was a lot different then. We had a relatively small staff; we had the old McDonald was where our headquarters was. And a staff of probably about fourteen people, and probably twelve of those people had law enforcement authority back then. And

when the hunt came around we could fuel a good crew of people to go out and work the hunts. I learned that trade from Ward and Elwood. I remember going into, things have changed a lot over the years; I remember the first day of the job. I walked into Steve's office, sat down in a chair across from him. He kind of leans back in his chair, opens a drawer and says, "By the way you have law enforcement authority." Pulls out a five shot revolver and a badge and handed it to me. "Okay this sounds good."

STEVE: And I said that's exactly how I (unintelligible).

DORN: And we had lots and lots of good times working the hunts, going to Harvey and June's for the Thanksgiving meal afterwards. And in the fire program, the first fire that I was on, I think it was on the St. Johns Refuge; that was probably in about '78 too. The tools we had, I used a palm frond to knock out the head of the fire that was working across the marsh. And of course both of those programs have changed dramatically over time, and especially the fire program. Steve mentioned the fatalities that occurred here, and really that was a turning point in the history of the Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Program. In 1978 or '79 Richard Bolt died in a fire...

WARD: '79.

DORN: ...'79, in Okefenokee and then Beau Sauselein and Scott Maness died in the fire here in June of '80; '81?

STEVE: '81.

DORN: '81, '81. And I remember Steve and Jim Pulliam, the Regional Director, were summoned to Washington D.C. to answer why these fatalities occurred. And as a result of those investigations they realized that Fish and Wildlife Service was not part of the Fire Programs, we didn't get any fire funding, we were not part of the Interagency Fire Program, we didn't get the same training. And so that's when Fish and Wildlife Service joined that Interagency Fire Community, and the Fire Program really got its; we were all burning, but things changed for the Fish and Wildlife Service after that.

Wonderful years. I think I served under three Refuge Managers, Steve, Ron, and Layne Hamilton. Strangely, I think there was seven Biologists that came through (unintelligible). And Jim Baker was there, Bill Leenhouts was the Biologist. Did you follow Dwight Cooley, Pat Hagan was in there somewhere.

DWIGHT: After me.

DORN: After you, and then Harvey Page; Harvey Hill, I'm sorry, Harvey Hill.

STEVIE: Rob (Name).

DORN: Well Rob was the Assistant Manager. He did a lot biology assisting, he was Assistant. Mark Epstein came in there and then Mike Legare, I'm not sure if that's seven. But my fondness memories, of course, are of the staff. It didn't take me very long to get a handle put me, I was Colonel Whiteside. And the way that came about was we were putting up signs around the refuge, I think we had seven signs that went in. And one of them was over between, on

the Banana River between NASA and Cape Canaveral. And I went over and talked to, it was right on the border of the refuge and the Cape, and I went over and talked to the Colonel over there to make sure that it was okay to put a sign out there on the causeway. And he said, yeah that'd be fine to do that. And so Elwood was helping me put in signs and he questioned, he said, "Are you sure we can put a sign up in this location? It looks awfully close to their boundary." "Elwood it's alright, I talked to the Colonel about that." And of course about two days after the sign went up, the order came down it was it on their property and we had to move it. And the Whiteside portion of it came; it was just the very beginning of the shuttle program. And we had a couple astronauts that came through and I think I gave a tour for their wives or something. And I got a nice signed photograph from one of the first astronauts, I don't think it was **Gripton**, it was one of the other ones. And I was sharing an office with a fellow by the name of Chip Sasser, and Chip was a young Assistant at that time. And he was looking at my photograph, I said, "Chip" I said, "You've got to know people to get photographs like this." And he takes the photograph out of my hands and looks at it and he says, "It was made out to a Dord Whiteside." (People laughing, casual talk). But I had a lot of good memories, memories that I'll never forget. Obviously the fondest memories come from the people I worked with.

DENNY: Jason you're up.

JASON: I'm up. Well my name is Jason Vehrs. I moved here with my family in 1977, I was 6 years old. And my dad, Steven, was the Manager here.

So I grew up with a lot of folks. I mean I grew as a child, kind of a foster child with a lot of folks, I should say. And it was a very neat experience doing that. I got to see the refuge from a different perspective, maybe than others, being my dad who was a Manager. I would see it from that perspective because I would be with him a lot. But then I saw it from the perspective of everybody else who worked there. And not always did those people talk the same way to each other, but I would hear a lot of it. So it was kind of neat perspective that I had. So I grew up going to a lot of parties, and doing a lot of things on the refuge. We often times had parties, and get together, and go clamming out on the river, and just a lot of fun things. And as I grew older, I became involved in the hog hunting program, which was at the time run by volunteers and spent most of my teenage years doing that every weekend. And got to spend a lot of time with firefighters and employees on the refuge who were on fire standby, and just a lot of fun; had a really good up bringing in this environment and got to see a lot of people come and go. And I was reminiscing on some folks who aren't with us anymore, and some others that haven't been mentioned are Jimmy Clark who was a firefighter and then a law enforcement officer here. Tommy, you mentioned Tommy...

DORN: Patterson.

JASON: Tommy Patterson. But old Two Hairs, no body's mentioned two hairs, John...

DORN: John **(Name)**.

JASON: And I spent a lot of time with John **(Name)**, he was a Biological



Technician here, came out of Fisheries right?

DORN: Fish Hatchery in (Name), North Carolina.

JASON: So he came here and I spent a lot of time with John and he became a very good friend of mine, he and Vera. Anyway so in 1990, I started with the refuge as a Forestry Agent and that was my first job in that was running YCC Crew that year. And then did fires with prescribed burning and wildfire, and did that for about five years in seasonal capacity as Forestry Tech in fire and the Forestry Program Equipment Operator, whatever. Spraying, worked with Shawn quite a while doing Brazilian pepper and melaleuca control; Ron was Manager at that point. And eventually got a permanent position as a Forestry Tech, and enjoyed every minute of that too; burning, did a lot of burning, and had a lot of run with all the fire folks and staff. And Nancy Hall, Nancy was a kind of real important figure in that time frame as well. And then I got a full-time law enforcement position, and like Emery said I went through FLETC with Emery just as a coincidence, but worked out really well. And was a Law Enforcement Officer for six years and I left in 2006, and currently am stationed at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge as an Officer up there.

(Some Causal talk)

DENNY: And seated next to you...

RON: I'm Ron Hight I was here from 1990 to 2009 as Manager. And my recollection's in some ways it's about all the meetings we ever had, and all the interaction with partners, and setting up

complexes, and figuring out, I remember once Bruce (Name) trying to figure who needs a supervisor; we've got a fairly large staff and we made index cards of all the staff. And we would put them on sticky board and move them around, realizing that we were working with people's lives in terms of their effectiveness as well as their ability to go up in career. And it was a tough thing trying to figure those kinds of things out and working with all the various partners, Archie Carr, and over on the Ridge and all that kind of thing. So that's not what I totally remember but that's what seemed to occupy a lot of my time personally. Paul mentioned the dusky and during my tenure, we had to deal with a lawsuit where we were being sued for a million dollars by a developer that wanted to change things out there. They were declaring the dusksies gone so the refuge has no value, so we had to go to federal court and those kinds of things. So those are the kinds of things that seemed to occupy a lot of my time. But there have been a lot of good people that have come through Merritt Island over the years. I've been blessed to work and know a lot of them and (unintelligible). I guess I've got one story I wanted to related that actually ties back to the old days when NASA didn't have airboats and flats and all that kind of thing. I was at Loxahatchee until 1972, and under Tom Martin (unintelligible). He set me here to work Apollo 17, which was the last launch to the moon.

DENNY: Night shot.

RON: And it was the only launch and I was in an airboat in Mosquito Lagoon and we didn't have cell phones and all that stuff. But somebody came on the

radio and said, "It's five minutes to launch." And whoever I was with in the airboat and I said, "We going south, as far as we can go." And we did, we went as far as we could go in Mosquito Lagoon and then it went from night to day in just a moment. I didn't even have a camera so I couldn't record that event, but the sky was full of birds and it just stuck with me. So fast forward 25 years later, and I'm here as Manager. And NASA was dedicating their Saturn 5 facility and a big black tie event and all these stuff, and I got to go. And Gene Cernan, who was the commander of Apollo 17, was there at the event and I got to talk to him and get his autograph, so it tied it together for me from that standpoint. That's just one little story; I'm not much of a story teller. We've got some classic story tellers here, and we need to them juiced up or something because...

DENNY: We need to tone a couple of them down.

RON: But Merritt Island obviously is home for me because I stayed here (unintelligible) raising my girls here. So I appreciate all of the people that came through there, and (unintelligible). That's about all I've got to say.



Jeff Fountain

JEFF: I'm Jeff Fountain, and I was Assist from 1974 to '77; a lot of good memories. A lot of things to cover. But first of all let's talk about the people, and we'll get some of that started. Elwood named everybody, he named (unintelligible) who was Ward. But what he hadn't said is that Elwood's nickname was Pigs, and we're not going to get into why it was Pigs, except to say that the people from Paint Lick, Kentucky must have a special affinity for their hogs. By way of (unintelligible) we touched on some law enforcement issues. And when Beau Sauselein showed up, I liked Beau, gave him his gun in a paper bag. It had five bullets instead of six, gave him a ticket book, and he made 52 cases that year, second only to Jim Baker, the biologist. Harvey Page that year made 2 cases, Lois Brown, the clerk made 2 cases. And that's the way we did it back then. And Elwood carried his gun in a sock in his pocket, and he normally carried his shotgun and wore camouflaged clothes. And Elwood had a love/hate relationship with the radiology department over at the hospital in Orlando. And you remember the orange glove story?

ELWOOD: Yeah, and I've been going over there lately too. (Unintelligible, laughing).

JEFF: (Unintelligible) if they ever got a chance to give him x-rays. Elwood used to patrol a certain area where they hunted and tell them about the guy that thought he was hidden one day.

ELWOOD: Oh the guy said he was out there, it done got up in the day and he said, "Well I guess you know where I hunted at today?" I said, "I sure do." I said, "You were hunting right down

there.” I said, “You had on an old red sweater and you had on them shiny round glasses on, you couldn’t have killed a duck anyway.” And of course right away that just put him way down. He said, “Well I’m going to get up where you can’t find me.” I said, “Hey I can slip up on you doc and come right down through the woods right there, and come out. You’ll never know it.”

JEFF: And he didn’t. But some of the other things about the staff, I have the date here, in 1975 one of Elwood cohorts, Edward Duffy, which we talked about, became the Service’s first, as far as I know, only quadruple dipper. He flipped a truck mounted crane, jumped off the high side, and broke his foot, which made him a retired military, retired military on disability. He was drawing a salary from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and he was on Fish and Wildlife Service disability. And those of you that know Duffy, can believe it. One of the other things, Elwood was our premiere surplus man. And one of the things we did, we picked up air equipped hose, which is specialty hose. And we had one hose that was Teflon, stainless steel braided hose, cost NASA \$25,000 because it all had to be proofed tested. We put it on a (unintelligible) as a hydraulic hose. Duffy managed to cut it in two. (People laughing). Any rate he and Ward worked together; Ward by the way probably also holds a record for being the only maintenance worker with a degree from Harvard. Well an economics degree (unintelligible). Elwood if you tell him some of the language difficulties y’all had (unintelligible, people laughing). ELWOOD: Being a PhD in economics, we’d think he’d be the number man to keep score at the (unintelligible). No

way, he’d get it all messed up. But anyway one day we were going up north to work on the gate, so we were getting our stuff together because it was way up the beach. So I told Ward, “Now we’re going to have to take (unintelligible) with us.” And he walked around there and the next thing I know here he comes with five gallon of water. I said, “What’s that. We don’t need that much water.” “You said Water.” I said, “No I said (unintelligible).” (Everyone laughing).

JEFF: Anyway it was an exciting time at Merritt Island, we did a lot research in different areas. The refuge at that time was on the cutting edge of sea turtle research, was just getting going. And Elwood, always the enervator, designed the first hydraulic turtle hoist to mount on a jeep. Whereas before they had a tripod and they only managed to tag and weigh like three turtles a night because you had to lift a 400 pound turtle up and hang it him off this chain hoist. And Elwood designed a hydraulic hoist on the back of a jeep, so that you just backed up to the turtle, cranked it up, weighed them, and I think we tagged close to 600 turtles that year. He also designed a tree cutter that OSHA would be real proud of. You remember that one?

ELWOOD: No I don’t.

JEFF: That one was mounted on a tractor, it was a 42 inch circular saw blade, wide-opened. The only way to cut palm trees is with a circular saw blade, you can’t use a chainsaw, you can’t chop them. And Elwood, he designed one that fit on the back of a tractor with a three point hitch. You backed up to the tree and got that blade

going, and you could cut down a palm tree in about five minutes.

ELWOOD: But don't tell OSHA.

JEFF: But also we did a lot of dusky stuff and you were talking about the duskies. We were here in '75 when we had a 2,100 acre fire in two hours that displaced 80% of the duskies; pretty much on the decline. We also had manatee research, the Fish and Wildlife Laboratory was starting up. And I have a note here that they tagged, and freeze branded, and sonar tagged a sub-adult male manatee on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July that died on the 17<sup>th</sup>; they had a lot of problems with that. Among other things, we would go up in the mobile assembly structure, and at the thirty-eight story level and watch the manatee that had been tagged down in the turning basin. And things like the fact that when a shark got too close, a six or eight foot shark, they would go over and bump it. Which also, we were doing manatee surveys, Elwood and I were responsible for them, and we had a pilot who owned the local airport. You remember his name? Any rate, it was a totally unsuitable plane. It was way too fast, Cessna 210. And on one of our surveys we flew from the Refuge, in the closed area, down to Fort Pierce and then back counting manatee; counted up, I think 100 manatees one time, that was the most on the east part of Florida.

ELWOOD: Taylor Dunn.

JEFF: Yeah Taylor Dunn. And so the second time we flew, Elwood and I had little of a dilemma the first time; Taylor liked to fish. The second time we were ready for him. We had already signed for annual leave for the entire afternoon. We

flew to Fort Pierce, he says "We really ought to be fishing." We jumped out of the plane, he kept a car down there, he kept a 28 foot cruiser down there. He had his co-hort with him, and in 45 minutes we were off shore, caught ten king mackerel, saw a whale, a hammerhead shark, got back in the plane and flew the survey back. And we're on annual leave for the time that, so it was legal too. There was some other talk, and then I'll shut-up, about tagging redbfish. Jim Baker and I, Jim, as most of you know, loved to fish. The man did not smile until he had ten fish in the boat, and he was phenomenal. I stood beside him casting trout (unintelligible), and he had the right twitch, and we would catch a fish every cast. And he'd get me to doing it, and I'd catch a fish every cast and about five cast later I was catching fish every ten casts. At any rate, we went down in an area deep inside NASA, I don't know where it was; it had not been available for fishing for years, and years, and years. And the question is, do fish learn? And the answer is absolutely. We tagged, we did not keep any fish, we caught trout down there; caught a fish every cast and tagged them and returned them. We went two weeks later, we caught a fish every third cast and tagged them and returned them. The next time we went down, it was a fish every fifth cast, which was a phenomenal thing on my part I didn't know they could pick up on it that quick, but apparently they can. It got to be quite a popular activity later on, it had to be (unintelligible, people laughing).

DENNY: We're close to the end of this tape, so let's take a break while we reload and we'll resume.



(Some causal talk)

(End tape 1, start tape 2)

DENNY: So without any further ado, it is a true pleasure and privilege to present to you, for those of you who don't know who he is, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Cole.

(Clapping)

DENNY: And Mr. and Mrs. Howard Poitevint. (Clapping) Okay you will have an opportunity here now...(some causal talk.) Each person had an opportunity to give some memories of their time (unintelligible) and in what capacity. And everybody was picking on Elwood, so I'll just give you (unintelligible).  
FRANK: Howard was here before me, why don't we present him.

DENNY: Go ahead Howard.

HOWARD: Well you got to remember I followed Jeff Foundation in here as Deputy Project Leader, so I had a hell of a mess to clean up. (People laughing). Steve Vehrs and I both basically arrived at the same time, we were actually on a house hunting trip the same week, didn't know the other one was in town, and we picked a house within about three blocks of each other. So that made it convenient...

STEVE: South of the tracks, right.

HOWARD: South of the tracks...

BONNIE: Affordable.

HOWARD: And east of the express way. I had a long move, I moved up from Vero Beach all the way up here; I

was actually working with Eco-Services prior to coming up here. Strayed off over there, because I was in Refuges at the time when the only way you could get a promotion, just about, was go to another division at that time; there was no such as step increases or you know going 5/7/9 in a place or 9/11/12, it just didn't happen. And so I kind of got upset with them and moved over to Eco-Services in Vero Beach for a while, and enjoyed that; got to go to with (unintelligible) scuba dive a bunch in the Keys. Then moved on up here and we got started up here, it was a pretty small staff when we got here. I want to say our total staff was about six or seven people total, when Steve and I first got here; very small staff. But within a couple of years it grew, but Elwood was here when we got here, and Ward Feurt was here, so we had the basis of a really good staff that like to go out and do different things and could do a bunch of different things. Ward at that time was a, I don't remember if you were a biotech or maintenance man.

WARD: I think maintenance.

HOWARD: But he was not in the refuge manager series, and somewhere along the way we were able to convince him if he'd go back and get just a few more courses, he could switch over into the Refuge Manager Series, and he did. I think that was a good move for him and Service in the long run. I never had been exposed to as many people around the refuge as what we had when we got here. All those folks going to the beach and coming through out here. And we had the best duck hunts in the state of Florida, so we had a lot of pressure from duck hunters here, and we spent a lot of time in law enforcement; Steve was real

strong on law enforcement. I can remember one thirty day period there when we had somebody working every dike all night long on the refuge just to see what we could see, and we saw a hell of a lot. One night out there with Elwood, we were watching this vehicle on the levee, just across the causeway over there, one of those mosquito control (unintelligible) on the left over there. And they were shining their lights, and they'd stop and they'd get out, and doing rounds, shine their lights again, get out and do rounds; boy Elwood turned the lights off on that truck and down that dike we went just hauling ass wide open. I thought for sure he was going to run us off into the water. When we got down there, the two guys, the first thing one of them said, "I got a pistol in my back pocket. I got a pistol in my back pocket." Well Elwood told thumped him like a hound dog on a bone. He got that pistol out, took it away from him. And I can't remember if the guy was an undercover FDLE Agent or something, I think he was a fellow law enforcement; it didn't matter to Elwood. (Unintelligible) out there on the refuge at night, shining a light knows those (unintelligible) and he wasn't supposed to be where he was.

ELWOOD: He worked for the state (unintelligible) State Attorney's Office.

(People laughing)

HOWARD: But he had loaded pistol in his back pocket, that's where the guy got off on Elwood's bad side. So Elwood unloaded his pistol for him, and he did give him his pistol back, but he didn't give him his bullets back when he gave him his pistol back. And I think the guy produced the proper certification and

anything to be doing what he was doing as far as having a pistol, but he didn't produce the proper certification to be out there casting that mullet at night on the dikes. We had a lot of those incidents over that thirty day, it was a, maybe even the same night but the same week Elwood and I ran up on a couple out there that and it was obvious that they weren't married. The biggest thing that lady was worried about was whether or not her husband was going to find out she was out there on the refuge at night. So we dealt with some really different issues.

DENNY: You learn a lot in situations like that you, don't you?

HOWARD: You do, you do. Some stuff, at that time I don't think I'd even been to FLETC; I never even had the 40 hours or whatever at FLETC, which that's all we took back then. If you got 40 hours, you were doing good back in those days. But we handled a lot of things, and then some other stuff that you didn't expect; we had a really big YCC Camp back in those days. We had fifty YCC enrollees, ten staff people with YCC. And then came along the YACC, and we wound up; Steve was very aggressive when they called him and said, "Can you have a YACC Camp down there?" And he said, "Why sure we can?" And for those of you who don't know, that's a year round program instead of just a summer program. So we took on basically a fifty person YACC Program and then when summer came around and we had fifty YCC's and fifty YACC's. We put Ward in charge of hiring some of those YACC's enrollee's and he interviewed them just like it was a Refuge Manager's job. And they'd come in and set down and go through the

interview and everything. And it was a real zoo around there in the summer when we had that many YACC, that many YCC and we're trying to do refuge work still. And you learn some things that young adults get involved in that our refuge folks didn't always get involved in, I guess is a good way to put it. It was a really, really interesting time.

DENNY: For the tape, tell us what YCC and YACC stands for because the person that transcribes that, going to "What is this?"

HOWARD: YCC is Youth Conservation Core, and YACC is Young Adult Conservation Core. And that was back in a time when they implemented the YACC (unintelligible) unemployment rates were way up for young adults and they were trying to help the employment rate, make it go up nationwide is what we were doing. It was a bunch of federal agencies that had YACC programs on their installations, whether it was a park, or forest, or a refuge. It was just unbelievable some of the magnitude of stuff we were able to do. That's when that coquina pit got reactivated and going over there and we were hauling coquina out of there in dump trucks, had YACC enrollees driving dump trucks and putting coquina on roads, and dikes, and levees; just like we had a million dollar contract out there (unintelligible) coquina. We had some real challenges, I guess, keeping up who was going where and who was doing what.

DENNY: What was your time span here, Howard?

HOWARD: I was here '77, came in the fall of '77, and I think I left in early

1980 and went to the Area Office. So that was my time span, basically, it was about three and a half years or something like that. I have to say, we hired a bunch of these folks around here, that are sitting here today; Dorn came when we were here, and Fred Adrian, and some other folks I don't think (unintelligible) some folks that we hired in YACC enrollees that came on and came into the system, you know later on as permanent Service employees. Probably one of the, one that impacts this area the most is Elizabeth Souheaver. We hired her as a YACC enrollee and then she came on as...

WARD: She was YCC first, then YACC.

HOWARD: Was she a YCC enrollee or staffer person first?

WARD: She was an enrollee, yeah she and Nora, and Cindy (Name). Yeah they were all enrollees. And Stevie.

STEVIE: They were high school kids from across the state.

HOWARD: Yeah they were high school kids to start with as YCC. Now you were a YCC staff person and then came into the YACC.

STEVIE: Right. I was a leader one summer because it was only a summer program, and then the next year; you did hire me, I forgot about that.

WARD: Well thank you.

STEVIE: I came, I worked at (unintelligible) South Lake Elementary, and I went out to the refuge to apply for the job straight from work, so I had

school teacher stuff on. And Lois Brown looked at me and she said, "Do you realize this is 99% outdoor work?" I did, but I thought you were supposed to dress up for an interview plus I had come from work. So they hired me to put the library together, but I did get to go on a lot of wildlife things. I saw dusky seaside sparrow; we hunted for (unintelligible) fasciata in the night time. Banded salt water (unintelligible), Rob Lee and I were the best team. We had (unintelligible, someone talking at same time), we found more; we had a system. I wasn't very good at catching, but I was in the front of the canoe, Rob was behind. So I would see one and Rob would jump out there and grab it. So yep, so...

WARD: So Howard if you're talking about your times here, I need to say something about that ski boat that you had.

HOWARD: Well I did have a fishing boat that turned into a ski boat on the weekends here at Merritt Island. We were talking about it not too long ago, that island on the right there as you go across the causeway out there directly across from the Marine Control office, became our base of operations out there. And we had a group of primarily refuge folks that got together every Sunday afternoon and we would waterski all afternoon. And then we'd go down to the smokehouse barbeque and eat barbeque after the waterskiing was over with. It was a really good group, close nit group of folks. You just did never know what to expect I guess. And we actually did some work along the way too. We probably had some of the best duck hunting in the state of Florida at that time, and just happened to be here when

our Migratory Bird Office, in their infinite wisdom, decided to make widgeon and pintail a ten point bird. And we had a lot of widgeon and pintail on the Merritt Island Refuge. And Steve and I figured out pretty soon that we could duck hunt a little bit and then do a little law enforcement on the side some other time. Steve had a duck machine, is what it became known as around here, a big old flat (unintelligible, background noise, sounds like thunder) all over the canal. And run down there to one of those levees and throw the PVC pipes on the levee and pull that sucker across into the impoundment. Throw out about a hundred decoys, which was a hell of lot more than anybody else ever had out there. Jason at that time was a little bitty whippersnapper, I don't know how big he was, but he could still carry a gun and he could still bring in ten ducks. One day he got a counting, he says "You know somebody's killed more than their limit of birds." (People laughing)...or something like that. But we had quite an experience with that deal. I can remember Sam Drake was an Assistant Refuge Supervisor in Jacksonville at that time. And Sam came down to go duck hunting with us one day, and we went out there and about three o'clock in the morning. And Steve and I put on our raincoats and he looked at us kind of funny, and he looked up at the sky and said, "Man the stars are shining, what are y'all doing?" I said, "Well we're just putting these on as a precaution." We got out there and Steve had a big ole lab that weighed about a hundred pounds, and when that lab jumped in the water there and got back in the boat he liked to shake off. And so when he shook off the first time right here by Sam, Sam knew why we put our raincoats on.



DENNY: We've had Liz to come, and how many of you don't know Elizabeth Souheaver? Welcome.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, so nice to be here.

DENNY: Right now we're just telling individual stories about our experiences here, but some of them have been stretched. And your employment, when you started and what was your term of duty, and what (unintelligible). So give us your story.

ELIZABETH: My name's Elizabeth Souheaver. Well it's (unintelligible) because Ward is the one who actually gave me my first job, came out and interviewed because I heard there was a summer program and you could come out for the summer for a couple months and earn a little bit of money in between school. So I had to do an interview with Ward, back in the trailer behind the refuge office. (Unintelligible), it was tough, it was tough, and he didn't like me; he wasn't really going to hire me except for Nora and a couple others pestered and said, "You got to have a (unintelligible)." (People laughing) (Unintelligible), so that's how I got out as a YACC. And after the summer I, I enjoyed it, and Howard gave me an opportunity to see what the refuge was all about. He really started taking me under his wing and just explored everything that I didn't know about this place, and this is my hometown. So had the opportunity to stay there for a year, worked a couple more short stints under the YCC Program, and then changed majors during that time and went back and got my degree in Wildlife Ecology in Gainesville. And then Howard to the

rescue again, I got into the Co-opt Program, which wasn't started at the University of Florida at that time. And since has produced many candidates, like Linda Walker right now with the Fish and Wildlife Service. But stayed on with the Fish and Wildlife Service and wanted to always come back to Merritt Island, had a chance years later but my husband thought it was too hot to come back here. And my two boys now would love to be back here, that's crazy, because they love to surf. But in all off that, just had a wonderful career with the Fish and Wildlife Service, have been blessed with lots of opportunities.

DENNY: And meeting such wonderful people.

ELIZABETH: And having a wonderful time, remembering good times, and it was magical to work here. It was short, very bright and shiny, very bright and shiny period of my life.

DENNY: Frank Cole.

FRANK: I asked Howard to go first because he was here earlier (unintelligible).

HOWARD: Before Frank gets started let me tell you where the Fire Management was before he got here okay, and then he can follow up with that. The first year that Steve and I was here, I grew up in the southeast and I liked to set fires, you know I liked to burn things and had been around prescribed fire programs as a student trainee at Piedmont Refuge and some other refuges. So one of the first things we did when we got here that fall AND was went down below the (unintelligible) building down there, and

picked out a thousand acre block down there that had a dirt road all the way around that thousand acres. And we just set off the whole dang thousand acres that one afternoon by hand, just got in the vehicle and set it off on one side and set it off on the other side, and then went home. It wasn't no big deal, a little bit of smoke and a lot of fire and we just set her off and went home. Well that was Bill Leenhouts's first week when we did that. And Bill was just wide-eyed with what we were doing out there, you know he just couldn't believe what we were doing hardly. And then we actually wound up with a YACC burning crew when they were here. We had some old military 37's, I think they were, and we put some spray tanks on the back of them and they'd go through the brush better than anything you got now-a-days.

STEVE: We were proud of that team too.

HOWARD: We were proud of that team, they were proud of what they were doing too, there's no doubt about it. And they actually were outfitted with Nomex and the whole bit, we got far enough along we actually had Nomex clothing at that time, which when we first got started we didn't. So Art Belcher came through here right after he became the Service's Fire Management Coordinator. He went through on a tour of the southeast, because we had the biggest fire program in the Service, primarily prescribed fire. And we were so proud of what we had, we went down there behind the old office when we were in the old chicken ranch, or chicken farm there and picked us out a spot down there and once again set off about a six or seven hundred acre fire, and we (unintelligible). Art and his wife Jenny

had gotten up on that camera observation platform down there and they were kind of watching. And Art just noticed that when the smoke got up about 500 feet, it peeled off and went totally in a 180 degree in the opposite direction. And he called me on the radio or I called him wanted to ask him what he thought about how it was going. He said, "Everything's going good now, but you might want to think about a wind shift." And about that time the wind shifted down on the ground, we almost burned down the dang office there before we caught the fire and got it good out there. So that was my first experience with Art Belcher and that's kind of where the Fire Program was. So somewhere along the way we decided we needed a little more professionalism and we got Frank Cole involved, I think I was in the Area Office already at that time probably. I can remember in Frank's application, Steve sent the applications up for me to look at, and one of the comments Frank made in his application, and it still sticks with me, said he had two boys who were lazier than a cut dog. And that was the only thing I really remember about his application; I don't remember what his experience was. (People laughing, unintelligible). Frank that's a lead into you now.

FRANK: I appreciate it. Yeah the truth is in today's world if you look at what is required for a resume, J.C. and I are no longer trying to build our resume. But I do know that they're very brief, basically you apply for a job over the internet with one page or something like that. Well in my case I wanted to really get this job, and so I sent in an application and a resume. I was at Bismarck, no I was in Colorado. I was in a Regional office in Colorado serving

in Energy, Ecological Services Energy Development. But I had a background in fire, I was raised in the southeast in the local area basically on a farm in (unintelligible) and had done a lot of burning as a child, or as a young man, and whatever else. Plus I had had a federal position, of managing the Fire Program on 68,000 acres in south Florida down there for Bureau of Indian Affairs. And got a bunch of experience and credentials and the necessary training, so I was trained up and credentialed up and knew all about the system and worked within the system very well, and in a pretty sophisticated program. So it looked pretty impressive, but I also just tried, looked too heady to be honest with you, so I tried to water it down and in the closing statement I said, "This resume may look impressive, but bear in mind I'm just a skoal dipping, southern Baptist and just a realist, and I've got two sons lazier than a cut dog." As Howard sights and so forth, just the closing paragraph that read like that. Well evidently it got Steve's eye, he called me out in Denver, and he said, "Do you have law enforcement training?" And I said, "No." He said, "I'm going to put you in for it." (People laughing.) I told you that to tell you I wasn't here very long, I didn't need law enforcement training to be honest with you. I had already come back from overseas all shot up, messed up or whatever. Anyway I wasn't interested in carrying any gun, but he knew I submitted all the credentials I had in the Interagency Fire Management Program. And so he just told me, he said "Don't bother to plant your spring garden." But Steve said, "I can't tell you that your selected" just as that old dilemma (unintelligible) "can't tell you that you're selected, but don't make any

significant changes" or something like that, "Don't commit yourself to anything significant." So we came on down here, bear in mind this was soon after, soon after the big fire and the fatalities, and we lost two excellent employees. And then on the heels of that, Scott and Beau, on the heels of that, a Congressman and I've forgotten his name.

STEVE: Sidney Yates.

FRANK: Yes, Sid Yates and he was the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee. And that handles all the interagency stuff for Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, or all the Interior Agencies. And he made a pledge, he said because he concluded, this is not my assessment, he concluded that we did not have adequate training, we did not have adequate protective gear, nor did we have adequate equipment to be fighting the fires and managing the program we had down here. So he gave, mid-term, he saw some money somewhere and authorized it down here to Merritt Island and Steve lead the charge to direct that being spent appropriately, and got a lot of stuff going. And so when I got here, we were able to continue on with the prescribed burning. The refuge had burned horrendously the year before or so when we had the fatalities. Actually we had to detail some people down here from Boise and other places in the country to provide assistance. And that gave us a good, gave the refuge a good introduction to what the Interagency capability was and how it could help. So when I got down here, we set out on a course of trying to hire and train people, and get people qualified and get all the necessary certifications and qualifications, and training, and drill

safety, and whatever. And so not that I got it completed by any stretch of the imagination, but by the time we were rolling along and I had been here a couple of years, they wanted me to move up to Washington. Actually when I was here, they had sort of an unrealistic expectation then, I was going to be the Fire Management Officer for all the refuges from Okefenokee down to the Keys. And Steve said, "If you're based here, you're going to take care of Merritt Island First." And to be honest with you, that was about all one person could do anyway and it took good efforts from management and the team, everybody in the organization rallied around to see that we would not have the problems that they had in the past. So we focused on that. The way I expressed it at the time was, Steve didn't want me to go much of anywhere to be honest with you. And they had a major fire over inside the city limits of Orlando and here we were sitting on helicopters the whole time with the capabilities and whatever else. And they called for assistance or help over there, and I think this was in '84, they called. And finally Steve released it and we went over there and we got all kinds of commendations, all kinds of positive press, and all kinds of stuff that went on out of that. And after that then we started reaching out a little bit, outside of our own refuge boundaries, but before that I sort of (unintelligible) I said, "Well Vehrs has one of my feet tacked to the floor, the other one can range as far as it wants too." As far as it could go, and so most of the calls for Okefenokee and other places went unanswered. But anyway I can think of a few strange things that I will tell you that in a couple of years I was pulled to Washington D.C. and then from Washington D.C. I took Art

Belcher's position in Boise, which is a seat for the National Fire Program. And while we were out there, we had an opportunity, again, a major shot in the arm for funding. Specifically we had done some analysis and figured that many throughout the national system needed financial assistance or needed a program, or had needs. And we worked, and having been in Washington and worked with some of the budget people, we tried to work up a budget for what the needs were. And when we got it all worked up, and the climate was right for us to just march over to, on the Hill there, and ask for the money basically, our budget people working in conjunction with the Department's people cut that to one-seventh, but even so we got a major new increase in money in about 1988 or something, and that helped many other refuges in the system to improve. That sounds awful serious, but let me tell you a couple milestones. One, when we got here we started putting together, like in 1985 I think, or three or four or something, we started putting together fire crews to send them out west to give them some experience. And these were folks that were working in all elements of the refuge. But we had to integrate those folks at first into a larger, they had to be assembled into a 20 men crew, or 20 person crews, and so we worked with other agencies, we worked with other locations and (unintelligible) and had combined what they called Interagency Crews. In 1988, right here was the hub, at Merritt Island, was the hub where the first FWS Fire Crew was assembled and sent out west specifically to fight on the (Spelling) fire. And brought a, I'm glad to get it out and share it with you, of that initial crew, hopefully you're recognize some of those folks in there. And



anyway that was the first Fish and Wildlife Service Fire crew that was credential and recognized by the Interagency community and deployed on fires. So made some real milestones in that way, but we also made some mistakes. I made a mistake one time and didn't think it was at the time. One time we had a fire right out here, in fact, and it was headed south; there wasn't as many homes here then, headed south for St. Johns Refuge. And I stayed out there on the refuge all night monitoring that situation to see what we were going to face the next morning. And come first daylight, Vehrs was on the radio was talking to me and he said, "How's it looking?" And I said, "Well it hasn't gone across yet, but we're going to need to get our fire crews together and get out here with some equipment." And he sent Allan Flock out here to see how I was doing, and he called Allan back to a phone so I wouldn't hear it over the radio, he said, "Is Frank Cole going to be able to lead those guys when they get out there or is he too exhausted?" Now I appreciate the responsibility he had and what he was shouldering, but at the time it was kind of an insult. Another funny thing that happened, that was more serious, we were prescribed burning on north end of refuge and it was when I would get a really, really good burning day, of course we had very detailed prescriptions.

STEVE: We were summer burning.

FRANK: Yeah we were summer burning. And we'd get an ideal day, I'd mark it with a star on that prescription so I'd know that was just as good as it gets. So one day we up there burning and we started off hand lighting a line on the west side and it was burning just

perfectly. The fine litter was burning underneath the pines there, and the twigs the size of your thumb and smaller were burning, but nothing large was really burning and it was heavy fuel. So I said, "This is great." Well I called for the helicopter and the helicopter came up there, we were going to start burning, after we established a little safety line off of this (unintelligible) line, we were going to ignite that with a helicopter. Well we started out then helicopter problems developed. So we had to scrub that burn that day, so we snuffed it out. And all the guys were pretty tired at the end, I said, "Okay but tomorrow we're going to go back." Now this is just in a case of one day's difference in drying. We started out after having had that hand lit line, and then a little bit of the helicopter line established; it was deadening out. We started out again with that additional margin and I was calling and checking, we were igniting as we went up there, first by hand and then by the helicopter. And Sammy Clark, or Ward, or somebody would call in and say, "Look we've got a spot over, over here." And I'd say, "Well get it. If you have an difficulty,..." it has spotted over the line is what happened, which we had not experience the day before. So I said, "Catch it if you can. Have any difficulties, let me know." So they'd catch it, and they'd go a little further and they said, "Got another spot over here, I don't know if we can catch this one or not." And then they'd catch it. Had about three or four spot overs, and finally Fred Adrian said, came on the radio and he said, "I think we're ready to start the helicopter burning now, we've got it black on both sides of the line." And with that I'll leave you.

DENNY: Robin.

ROBIN: I have a few thoughts, they're for men who played an important part of my early career. I started here in 1971, in August, and I met Jim Baker, Dr. James Leonard Baker, Cal O'Conner was the first Refuge Manager, but the second refuge manager, whom I dearly love, was Bob Yoder. And Lawrence Wineland, Seth L. Wineland, was the Bio-tech at Pelican Island. And fourth the fellow I'll tell you about was never stationed at Merritt Island but his name was Tommy Hines, he was the Special Agent Pilot and he was stationed Sebring, he and his trusty Labrador Retriever. So I can tell you, Gail Baker is here today, she has given me some notes on Jim's career. Jim was really special to me; he and I received law enforcement authority and the same time. In my case, Hal O'Conner came in one day and said, "There's been an executive order that allows women federally employed to have law enforcement authority." This was a few days before the opening waterfowl season. So he handed me this decrepit .38, a few bullets, and a badge and said, "You now have law enforcement authority." It was the last thing in the world I ever expected, and Jim, same thing. So Jim had been a lifelong hunter and fisherman, he understood natural resource law enforcement, and I didn't have a clue. But I spent a lot of time with Jim in the field, and with Tommy Hines. Tommy took it upon himself to be sure I learned how to stay alive as a law enforcement agent. Tommy passed away this spring; I owe a debt of gratitude to him. He taught me how to deal with maybe not friendly characters and leave them with a smile on their face, and also with information on a pink slip. I have a couple of hair raising law

enforcement stories. One of my first cases I was alone, I was at the north end of the refuge, and I heard somebody shooting ducks. And I ventured out into the marsh and here were two fellows, it was a closed area and not only that it happened to be a day when there was supposed to be no hunting on the refuge. So I made the case, I apprehended these two men; they were both gentlemen. I was telling J.C. last night I was biting my fingernails because they had a bunch of hens and I hadn't held all that many female gadwalls, and female widgeons, and I was hoping that I was describing the right bird on the pink slip. And I seized their birds and I got back to the office, and somebody said to me, "What happened up there?" And I said, "Well let's see. The first guy I wrote up was old Earl Frye, and all a sudden everybody held their breath." Old Earl Frye was the Executive Director of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission; it was one of the hallmarks of my career. To make a long story short, he and his friend declined to pay and declined to go to magistrate court, because they wanted to go to U.S. District Court, so the case went on, and on, and on for six months. And then fortunately one day as I'm all dressed up in civilian clothes ready to go to Orlando to District Court, we got a call that the case had been dropped fortunately. Another story, Jim and I, I loved doing law enforcement work with Jim because Jim was a smoker, and the mosquitoes were fierce when you'd be standing out there in the marsh. So I would stand close to him and I'd be enveloped with cigarette smoke and the mosquitoes wouldn't bother me. We spend several days on a dike just south of the main road when you go into the refuge. And the reason we were out there was that

Jim and I were out there one day and he stepped on a conibear trap, a number 6 conibear. And that thing clamped this ankle and I couldn't pull it apart, and he never told Gail this story. I couldn't pull it apart, he had the strength to pull it apart and release his own ankle. So we knew somebody was trapping otters out there. And since we knew where it was, we were the two saps who had to go out and sit on this area. And one day we saw a jeep coming and we thought, oh no it's our day, here they come. So the jeep came along and Jim and I had a strategy all set up. Jim was going to stand on one side of the dike, I was going to stand on other and we knew what we were going to say to one another depending on who was going to make the first contact. Well the jeep kept pulling closer and closer to me and I kept backing into the edge of the dike and I had the heels of my shoes in the water thinking okay any minute I'm going to have to jump into the water. The vehicle came to a stop and Jim apprehended the guy, he had to wait until the passenger actually took possession of the otter in the trap. And so when it was clear to me Jim had seen the contact, he made contact with the guy, the passenger, then I had to confront the driver. So I came up out of the bushes next to the front bumper of this jeep and I said to man, "Would you please quietly get out of the car?" And he said to me, "I can't." And I thought oh I'm in big trouble, if it were Jim he'd just reach in and pull the guy out and I couldn't do that. So I asked him three times and each time he declined (unintelligible), he said, "I can't get out of the vehicle." And so finally he said to me, "I'm a paraplegic." Well I thought, oh I'm in real trouble now. So I eased up closer to the jeep and I could see all

the hand controls and so I made my case with him through the window of the jeep. And we seized the otter; we found out later that there were three brother involved with otter poaching and that they were very discreditable characters that actually shot at a (Name) sheriff, a deputy at one point. Anyway Jim and I went to court and we had to go in civilian clothes, and the paraplegic was in a wheelchair, his two brothers were there to support him and the father was there; the father was pushing this guy. And I was there in my gray flannel suit standing outside the courtroom; Jim had gone off to the men's room or some place. And the guy in the wheelchair looked at me and said, "What are you doing here." I knew who he was, but he didn't recognize me. Anyway the judge found them and seized weapons and all sorts of stuff. So Jim and I had some great fishing experiences too, if I wanted to bum a ride in the morning to work, if we started at 7:30, I had to meet Jim at 6 because he would fish for an hour off the causeway. And so I would fish for an hour with him and then we'd watch our watches and go on into work. We actually looked for Florida duck masses, north of the vehicle assembly building in some marshes there. And we were out there one day in a john boat, and Jim looked around he said, "You know what, I think this is a sewage lagoon." And it turned out that it was in fact the sewage that was coming out of the vehicle assembly building before they had an actually proper sewage treatment facility there. So it was a hasty retreat, we didn't spend much time there. But Gail wrote up a few words about Jim, and he started at the refuge in 1971. He had been working on his PhD when he was working part-time at Noxubee, and Jim started a week before I did. And he went

from here to the Washington Office in '75 in the Endangered Species Office, came back to Merritt Island in '76. And he moved the area office in Jackson in '78, and then they moved onto Alaska a couple of years later. And let me, Gail asked me to read a message that it was a quote of Bill Leenhouts, he said, "Jim loves this place too much. I'm not sure anyone before or since loved Merritt Island as much as Jim did. He was involved in all aspects and all the animals and plants on the refuge, especially ducks and the dusky, but also manatees and fish, especially (Name) trout and redbird, shorebirds, shrubs like (unintelligible, sounds like thunder)." So we all miss, we love Jim and we miss him. Bob Yoder was the second Refuge Manager when I was here, and he passed away about a year ago. He was a very gentle man, he loved the resource, it was his primary focus and the political world just kept it slightly at bay; his focus was the resource. He did something that J.C. and I were just marveling about, you all have probably seen the dike on the east side of Mosquito Lagoon, behind the dunes. I don't think we did one bit of environmental compliance work, we just got up one day and decided that we needed a dike on the east side of the mosquito lagoon, so we put in a dike on the east side of Mosquito Lagoon. I don't know how, it never would have occurred in modern times, but we did it back then. Bob was determined that I, as an Assistant Refuge Manager, should have sorts of work experiences, and I remember being assigned to operate the little bulldozer we had and we were clearing an area around the shop, and I spent a week on the bulldozer. Lawrence Wineland, and I'll talk about Lawrence in a minute, Lawrence gave me a thirty minute lesson training on the

bulldozer, and then turned me loose. And what we didn't know, and I found out almost the hard way, was that that area had been used for something else and that there were steel cables in the ground all over that place.

STEVE: Old boneyard.

ROBIN: Boneyard, it was a boneyard and I was assigned to clean up the boneyard, which had a lot of vegetation in it. But I have great respect, all these years later, for anyone who operates a bulldozer because every night I'd get home and my whole body would tremble. I never knew there was such vibration in the (unintelligible). And Bob Yoder took NASA and NASA security with a great sense of humor, and one day the Chief of Security called him, Bob was in his office and we were all in there for a meeting. And Lois Brown said, "The Chief of Security is on." So he picked up the phone and we could hear the Chief of Security yelling into the phone, and he said, "YODER, YOU'RE PARAMETER'S NOT SECURE!" This was before the (unintelligible). Bob stood up and he looked around at his rear end, and he quietly said to the phone, "My parameter looks secure." And of course we couldn't laugh because this was serious stuff. But we were all fond of Bob, he was a gentlemen.

Lawrence Wineland, we knew him as Lawrence some people knew him as Seth, but he was Seth L. Wineland. I learned last night that he started with the Fish and Wildlife Service (unintelligible, sounds like thunder), and he was assigned to Pelican Island as the Biological Technician. And he loved that island, he protected it with his heart and soul, and we were all crazy about him too. He and Edith, his wife,

enriched our lives when some of us would have to go down to work at Pelican Island banding or doing survey work, we were always invited to stay with Lawrence and Edith. They had a plot of land with a trailer on it, and when I knew Lawrence and Edith, they had four beagles and then roller pigeons and rabbits and you name, goats and everything else. But it was always an experience to stay in the trailer with (unintelligible, others talking), and they lived on sulfur water and never noticed it, I don't know how they wouldn't. But they were wonderful. And I mentioned Tommy Hines, lastly, he would come over for, especially for the first part of our waterfowl hunting season. And Denny told me I could tell this story because Hal O'Conner is not here. On the eve of the waterfowl hunting season, there would always be an oyster roast at the shop. And when I arrived, Fish and Wildlife Service, let me back up a step, I think there were only 3,000 employees and there weren't any professional women, and so I was an oddity. So one of the first mistakes Hal made was that one of our first oyster roasts, he decided that I was a woman and I shouldn't be there alone with all these men; I worked with them every day, but shouldn't be there alone. So he made the near fatal mistake of inviting one spouse who was Dr. Gail S. Baker, Jim's wife, and he left all the other wives behind; he never made that mistake again let me you. Hell broke loose after that. But he best Hal story I have, since he's not here I can tell it. Tommy Hines came one eve of the waterfowl opening, and he came with his Labrador retriever. And Hal was (unintelligible) came up to J.C.'s shoulder (unintelligible) maybe, Hal wore elevator shoes, wellington boots (unintelligible), and he also stuck his

pant leg (unintelligible, sounds like it's raining) shook our head behind his back. Anyway, it's dark, there's a little bit of beer flowing, everybody's eating oysters. And Tommy Hines's dog walked up to Hal's leg sniffed a couple of times and then raised his leg and filled one of Hal's wellington boots. And we were all going oh god we couldn't believe what was happening, we thought it was fantastic but none of us could laugh. I don't want to monopolize this but I have a few wildlife observations that will stay with me forever. One was my seeing a black bob cat on Merritt Island, and everybody looked at me like, "Oh it's a house cat, she doesn't..." So I did a little investigation and found out, I think Stanley Young was the biologist who wrote a (unintelligible) bobcats and said that there was a (unintelligible) population of black bobcats on Merritt Island; he wrote that in '59. And I don't know that anybody has ever seen one sense. And I know in the '90's black bob cats had been documented along the sandhills of Florida, central, but never mentioned here on Merritt Island. The spotted skunk was something that none of us knew existed here until I had to set up a trap line, we were wondering who was eating the turtle eggs. And so I had all my live traps set up in the dunes on Playalinda Beach, and the very first morning I went out, "What is that?" It was a beautiful little spotted skunk, I'd never seen one before. And so I'd caught one raccoon and one bobcat, but I went out day after day to check the traps and it got to the point where these sweet little spotted skunks, and I learned as a student how to approach them without getting sprayed. I would just get down on my hands and knees and I'd opened the trap (unintelligible). I'd open the trap, they'd walk out and then they'd put



their front legs on, 'cause I'd be on my hands and knees, on my thigh where I would have dried my hands after, with cat food, I'd be baiting them with cat food and I'd just dry my hands, and these little skunks would come around for a snack of cat food, of course I'd be very careful not to move too quickly, but that was a highlight too. Jim Baker had a wonderful story about duck hunting one morning, and he had his eye on some redheads that were coming across, and all of a sudden a Peregrine falcon with (unintelligible) on, came through and chipped the redhead out of the sky and kept going; he couldn't believe his eyes. Anyway for me those early years were really special. As I said there were only 3,000 employees in the Fish and Wildlife Service and it was a very close nit, warm family. And one other thing, Joan touched on this, in my early days; I was only here 2 years. We would all, J.C., and Jeff, and Glenn and we'd all be out in the field all day during Thanksgiving and when we would come back at the end of the night, and it would be dark, the spouses would have all gathered together and cooked up Thanksgiving dinner and we'd all come in looking like muddy rats. And these wonderful woman would have this feast for us, now I'm going to cry, it was very much a family experience. And for me I learned a lot here that I applied in other aspects of my life; it was a wonderful experience.

Joan: May I just say this one thing at about the Thanksgiving at my house, we hand all this food out in the kitchen, in the dining room, in the living room, and wherever we could put it, but there was no room for the coffee pot. I had one of these big urns, you know about 24, 26 cups whatever it was. So the only place

that was really unoccupied was the bathroom. I don't know if you remember but the coffee pot was in the bathroom, and you'd say pardon me while I go get a cup. (Everyone laughing.)

DENNY: We have three minutes left, so this might be a very good breaking point.

[End tape two]